C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 000729

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/17/2016
TAGS: ECON PGOV PREL BL
SUBJECT: LANDLESS MOVEMENT TRIED TO STRONG ARM GOB

Classified By: Amb. David N. Greenlee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Landless Movement (Movimiento Sin Tierra or MST
in Spanish) used dynamite to take control of the Justice
Ministry for several hours on the afternoon of March 13,
seeking the release of its members jailed for the June 2004
lynching of Ayo Ayo Mayor Benjamin Altamirano (see human
rights report) and the 2003 murder of Miguel Dupleich, among
others. After its attempts to pressure the GOB by blocking
the highway between Oruro and La Paz failed, the MST turned
to more drastic, direct measures with the Justice Ministry.
The Ministry's Director of Indigenous Affairs, Miriam Campos,
told us on March 15 that she and Justice Minister Casimira
Rodriguez negotiated with MST leaders for several hours. In
the end, the Morales government refused to release the
defendants, but did promise them a fair trial and legal
representation in the form of public defenders. As a result
of the standoff, Minister Rodriguez canceled her planned trip
to Venezuela; we have not heard any reports of injuries
associated with the takeover.

¶2. (C) Comment: To the GOB's credit, it didn't cave in to the
MST's strong arm tactics, which would have set a dangerous
precedent for an organization which in many rural areas,
already operates above the law. End comment.

GREENLEE